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January 5, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE

SUBJECT: The War in Vietnam During the Next Year

At your request, the CIA has produced a report on Communist military intentions in South Vietnam during the next year or so (Tab A). In short, the report concludes that any substantial change in Communist military tactics in South Vietnam is neither feasible nor likely during the next six months. But there is some evidence and a fairly persuasive rationale to support the proposition that the Communists may consider stepping up the war significantly a year from now.

A summary of the various aspects covered in the report follows.

Current tactics

-- To a greater extent than at any time in the past ten years, Communist forces are on the defensive and must protect themselves. Only rarely do the Communists risk the heavy manpower losses that were once commonplace.

-- Reports from [ ] captured enemy documents, and interrogations are consistent with this observed pattern of activity. The most recent report of this kind comes from [ ] who read the text of a top secret COSVN Directive issued in mid-October. The directive said that during the current dry season VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam would avoid costly large-scale engagements while carrying on guerrilla warfare and rebuilding their apparatus.

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NSA Review Completed

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Public anomalies

-- A recent article by Tran Nam Trung, one of COSVN's military leaders, placed more explicit stress on the need for big unit warfare than any other public Communist statement during the past two years. It could signal an intensified military drive somewhere in Indochina, but more likely reflects a renewed policy debate over the degree of external support needed in the South.

Infiltration

-- North Vietnam's recent infiltration activity reflects a concern for its corridor through southern Laos. Although it is true that infiltration this year is substantially higher than last, almost all of the infiltrators last year were bound for South Vietnam. This year, the bulk of them are headed for south Laos and Cambodia. Indeed, the southward flow of manpower is judged to be no more than what the Communists need to maintain their force levels and to continue to do what they have been doing in South Vietnam.

Mobilization in the North

-- The extent or duration of the mobilization campaign in the north is difficult to judge. It began after the change of government in Cambodia, and it seems clear that many many more men have been called up in 1970 than in 1969.

The Near Term. The weight of this evidence leads CIA to conclude that the Communists will maintain current tactics for the next six months or so. A military thrust in I Corps or the central highlands cannot be ruled out; even should one materialize, however, it would not amount to a significant change in Communist tactics.

The Vietnamese Communists have their hands full in Indochina, and many of their military assets are tied up with matters that must be faced now. Primarily, they must assure the security of their vital supply lines running through Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam. This is a large order; it requires time, enormous effort, and substantial manpower.

Next Year. Communist action next year, of course, will be heavily influenced by what happens between now and then. Even so, Hanoi may be compelled to re-assess the situation in South Vietnam simply

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because the VC guerrillas and subversive apparatus there have not been doing the job. The Communist apparatus in the South has not been uprooted and is still a major asset, but it is suffering erosion and is unable to stem the slow but reasonably steady growth of South Vietnamese capabilities.

Hanoi could adjust to this continuing trend by adopting a more forthcoming negotiating stance, but this seems unlikely. It seems more likely that Hanoi would first opt to step up the fighting in an attempt to improve its position on the ground and to force some allied concessions in Paris--especially in view of U.S. presidential elections later in the year.

Comment. We have omitted a few of the complexities and shadings in the report, and you may wish to read it through. Generally, it strikes us as a fairly judicious if wordy effort to satisfy your request.

We must of course keep in mind that major unforeseen developments seem to have become the rule in Vietnam, and this past year has been no exception. Thus one-year estimates must be treated with caution.

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TAB A IS:

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Vietnam War: What Lies Ahead?

  
24 December 1970

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